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ABSTRACT

Twice exceptional students are those who have emotional disturbances or behavioral disorders (E/BD) and who also display characteristics of high intellectual ability. Case studies were developed over a 3-year period on three male junior high school students who fit this definition. Data were interpreted using Kazimierz Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration, in which progressive conflicts and contradictions arise from life experience and become a fundamental and positive factor of development. The theory stresses the affective aspect of development and postulates five levels of individual development, each with a distinguishable personality organization. Dabrowski indicated that advanced development could be predicted by examining five types of overexcitabilities in response to stimuli. More numerous and more intense overexcitabilities suggest higher potential for advanced development. Psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational, and emotional overexcitabilities manifest themselves as building blocks of the five levels of development. Case study data revealed four general categories of behavioral and motivational themes. The three students provided evidence of Level-I egocentrism, overexcitabilities, and asynchronous development, three areas informed by Dabrowski's theory. In addition, a fourth theme emerged: acute awareness of manipulation. Implications for effective interventions with gifted E/BD students are discussed. Contains 10 references. (SV)

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UNDERSTANDING THE EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TWICE EXCEPTIONAL RURAL STUDENTS

Children who have severe emotional disturbances or behavioral disorders (E/BD) are struggling for academic success in American public schools. Many teachers are ill-prepared or unprepared to work with students who have disabilities (Shanker, 1995). Often, earning fear, neglect, or at best worry from their teachers, students with E/BD are less likely to be fully included in general classrooms. Failure to achieve in school is a major characteristic of students with E/BD. Indeed, some believe that average or even depressed intelligence and depressed achievement are consistent descriptors of these students (Coleman, 1992).

An anomaly has recently been introduced in special education with individual students with E/BD and characteristics of high intellectual capability. For these students the need for appropriate educational services increases while the conflict for how to best provide services also increases. Known as twice exceptional students, children with E/BD who are also gifted are an enigma. One the one hand, it has been determined that they resemble low achievers with emotional difficulties. One the other hand, the nature of giftedness presents the potential for an increased capacity for intellectual awareness, interpersonal, and emotional development (Piechowski, 1986).

Little is actually known about the emotional development for gifted E/BD. The purpose of this study was to explore the emotional development issues related to students with E/BD who are gifted. Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration was used as a lens to focus a better understanding of these students. This theory allows for an interpretation of often conflicting behavior and motivation within an emotional framework.

DABROWSKI'S THEORY

Kazimierz Dabrowski, Polish psychiatrist and psychologist, stressed the affective aspect of development in his Theory of Positive Disintegration. Within the developmental process, progressive conflicts and contradictions arise from life experience and become a fundamental and positive factor of development. Current psychological structures break down and are replaced by more advanced structures. Dabrowski postulated five discriminating levels of human development, each with a distinguishable personality organization (Nelson, 1989).

Level I, an egocentric formation, gives way to Level II, a life of horizontal conflict and competition between equal mainstream values. A structure of multilevel values within Level III propels an individual towards self-responsibility and

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integrity. Level IV beings show high levels of autonomy, responsibility, and empathy for others. A deepening understanding of universal ideals is present. At Level V inner conflicts are resolved. Values and life are congruent; ideals and conduct are in harmony.

Dabrowski indicated that advanced development could be predicted by examining five types of overexcitabilities in response to stimuli. Greater numbers of overexcitabilities present and greater intensity, suggest higher potential for advanced development. Psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational, and emotional overexcitabilities manifest themselves as building blocks of the five Levels. The most significant of the overexcitabilities as prediction of advanced development is emotional in combination with intellectual (Nelson, 1989). Dabrowski further asserted that ultimate control and direction of behavior is located in emotional, rather than intellectual function (Colangelo, 1989). The critical force of overexcitability, however, contributes both positive and negative features. The positive aspect is that the perspective of life is enlarged to allow the gifted chid to fully appreciate the joys of life. The negative aspect is that a great deal of human suffering, injustice, and sorrow are brought into focus

The developmental potential of gifted students encompasses certain innate response patterns that provide a foundation for the development of higher order values in adult life (Silverman, 1994). Heightened sensitivity, emotional intensity and reactivity, feeling different, perfectionism and uneven development of intellectual and emotional domains are common traits (Lovecky, 1992). In fact, an alternative definition of giftedness has been offered as follows:

Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for them to develop optimally (The Columbus Group, 1991 from Silverman, 1994).

METHOD

Subjects Three junior high school male students were eligible to participate in this exploratory study. Records were reviewed anonymously for all three students; whereas, only one student participated in the depth interview related specifically to Dabrowski's theoretical concerns. Permission to participate was granted. Commonalities among the students include a score on the WISC-R that falls two standard deviations above the mean; and, diagnosis of a disruptive behavior disorder by a licensed psychologist. The disruptive behavior disorders include conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder. Conduct disorder is primarily manifested by aggression towards people and animals, destruction of property, and theft. Oppositional defiant

disorder is exhibited through loss of temper, argument, refusal to comply with requests or rules, deliberate annoyance of others, blame towards others for mistakes made, and touchiness (Hardman, Drew, & Egan, 1996).

Instruments Case study data were collected from a records review of each student using three primary sources: behavior logs completed by school personnel, observations completed by trained observers, and teacher anecdotal records. The depth interview was based on questions from Piechowski's Overexcitability Questionnaire as adapted by Piirto (1992).

Procedures Data were collected over a three year period. Case studies were developed from file material representative of and related to emotional development. The data were analyzed for common patterns or themes. Presented here are the patterns and themes related within the emotional framework of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration.

RESULTS

Results reveal four general categories of behavioral and motivational themes. The students in this study provided evidence of Level I Egocentrism, Overexcitabilities, and Asychronous Development, three areas informed by Dabrowski's theory. In addition, a fourth theme of an acute Awareness of Manipulation emerged from the data analysis.

Level I Egocentrism The emotional vulnerability of gifted individuals allows for susceptibility to damage through neglect, abuse, lack of understanding, or insensitivity. An emotionally damaged gifted youth has greater intellectual capacity to put in the service of personal ambition. This may, therefore, present a greater danger to society than a young person who has less ability (Silverman, 1994). Twice exceptional students with progressive labels such as Gifted/Inattentive/Seriously Emotionally Disturbed or Gifted/Abused/Abuser reflect a downward spiral in terms of developmental potential.

N: When I'm taking something that's not mine I'm always thinking that I know I'll get caught. Sometimes, though, I don't and I get to keep it.

J: I hit that guy because he bumped into me in the hallway. I don't know him, but I know he was out to get me. I decided to get him first, so I got him and got him good.

Overexcitabilities The paradox present for students who are gifted and E/BD is that within the emotional overexcitability, the human suffering brought into focus is often their own. The heightened emotional sensitivity of gifted individuals produces great intensity of feeling, anxiety, affective memory, fear, and guilt. Feeling derived from relationships "is the mainstuff of

individual development from a lower to a higher level" (Piechowski, 1979, p. 38).

N: It's hard to sit in school. When I pace or drum teachers don't like it. Kids tell me to shut up. Everyone thinks ritalin helps but it don't. (Psychomotor)

A: I love colors like deep, deep red. I like the taste of the color. (Sensual)

N: I do want to do better at school. I don't want to get my mind going here. I hope my grades will just sort of pop up. (Imaginational)

A: The other night I had this dream that this guy shot everyone on earth but me. I managed to wake up before he shot me. I don't want to have that dream again. It wasn't particularly pleasant. Do you ever wonder why you have dreams? (Imaginational, Emotional)

N: I remember things from when I was little and it's like being there again. Five years ago our class went to watch a basketball game. We were in the bleachers and the kid next to me and I had cokes. This stupid kid sat on one of the cokes and coke shot out everywhere. I got some on my leg and shorts. I was really upset and yelled. I still want to hit him. He should have watched where he was sitting. (Emotional)

J: I don't want to go home tonight. You-know-who is there. I really hate him. (Emotional)

J: Animals must have feelings. When you swat a fly it must hurt. (Emotional, Imaginational)

Asynchronous Development Dabrowski dared to address development in terms of emotion and cognition. Gifted children are known to differ from others not only in intellectual development, but also in social and emotional development. The ability to trust and respect others within a relationship signifies multilevel potential. Conversely, insensitive or abusive relationships may overwhelm a sensitive student and stymie development of more advanced structures.

A: It drives me crazy when I watch someone do something and I know the right way. I try to tell them that's not the right way. When

they don't listen, I make it hard for them. I figure when they can stop being such a pain in the butt I'll stop.

J: I help people if I can. I look for the good, but if they make me mad or don't suit me I try to make it bad for them.

Awareness of Manipulation It may be difficult for the progressive conflicts and contradictions that arise from the life experiences of gifted and E/BD students to become a fundamental and positive factor of development. Often the results of intensive behavioral interventions with these students has taught them how to manipulate the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others.

N: I hate that counselor. I'm not talking.

A: My counselor wants to be friendly. I just go along with it. Whatever he says I agree with. Why would they think I'd work for tokens?

J: I like to go in and talk. Sometimes I make things up to talk about. Someone asked about ADD so I talked about these symptoms I had and the counselor got real interested and said he'd talk to my teachers.

J: I like to argue. If the teacher says do ten problems, I holler that it's too many. I don't know why I do it. It's just fun. I'm good at getting off subject. I gain time to do what I want or get attention.

A: My parents told me that if I get my grades up I can go visit my cousins in California over Christmas break. I know they want me out of the house so it won't matter about my grades. They like a break from me.

DISCUSSION

The theory of Positive Disintegration provides a relevant framework for understanding the complex personalities of the gifted (Colangelo, 1989). In this study Dabrowski's theory was used as a framework to explore the emotional development of twice exceptional students who are both gifted and E/BD. General themes emerged that pertained to Level I Egocentrism, Overexcitabilities, Asynchronous Development and Awareness of Manipulation.

The concept of developmental potential binds educational goals to self-actualization and advanced moral development, rather than to mere productivity in adult life (Piechowski,

1986). This has implications for effective interventions with students who require extensive resources if they are to learn productive ways of living. Capacity for advancement is seen in disintegration, a process in which psychological structures break down in order for more complex and advanced structures to form. Current psychological structures do not easily break down to be replaced by more advanced structures. This perspective calls attention to the need to carefully support and reframe the inner conflict of emotionally/behaviorally disordered and gifted students. Current emotional interventions seek to eliminate anxiety and disintegration. This study provides preliminary evidence that emotional development must be emphasized as strengths and evolution of the emotional lives of these twice exceptional students.

The anomaly of individual students with E/BD and characteristics of high intellectual capability highlights the fact that current practices are not necessarily providing appropriate educational services. A new framework within education seeks to restructure to accommodate individual diversity. In this case interventions must acknowledge the exacerbated asynchronous development of twice exceptional students. Rather than a concentration of behavioral management techniques for the outer environment, students must fact their inner world of turmoil and its implication for health and advancing development.

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